# They Fight Without Weapons

**The dramatic story of men who risk their lives on the strangest battlefronts of all**

**BY H. R. BAUKHAGE**

TWO MEN adrift at sea in an open boat. A relentless sun above; the last drop of water long since gone. The younger man has already begun to mumble incoherently, looking furtively over the gunwale. Suddenly he leans down——

"Stop, you fool! You know if you drink salt water it will kill you!"

That's a story enacted many times in these days of sinking ships.

But a stranger one is being enacted in a Boston hospital. Hunger and thirst again. A young man, his face pale, his lips dry, rises to his feet as his comrade nods and asks:

"How do you feel?"

"I'm not hungry any more, but I'm weak in the knees."

"All right, this is your last one for a while."

The young man pours out a glass of water and slowly drinks it. It is sea water.

Salt water test.

It isn't his first drink from this flask, filled with a sample of the Atlantic Ocean off Nantucket, for the young man is one of a group of conscientious objectors acting as "guinea pigs" in a series of scientific tests to ascertain "the utilization of sea water by the human body."

There are six in this one experiment alone, young fellows "conscientiously opposed to killing," as one of them put it, "but willing to die, if necessary, that others may live." They have been deferred from combatant military service to do "work of national importance under civilian direction" in accordance with the Selective Service and Training Act of 1940.

For a long time, thoughtful doctors have questioned the validity of the tradition that drinking salt water drives mad those whom it does not kill. Then last summer, while the submarine was wreaking its havoc off our shores, three prominent members of the medical profession discussed the question in Boston and suggested experimentation to the National Research Council, which in turn called upon the National Service Board for Religious Objectors to furnish the men. This organization acts as the representative with the Government of the conscientious objectors who have been deferred from military service on religious grounds. The board decided that the experimentation would benefit humanity as a whole and was not solely a military measure. It called for volunteers. Two were chosen as the first of the "guinea pigs," and four more have since joined them.

Two types of tests are being made. In one a liberal amount of fresh water is taken and the boys drink as much as three glasses of sea water a day. In the other, fresh water is limited to the point where life can be sustained for only ten days. Then specific foods are substituted for a certain proportion of this minimum supply of water, to ascertain if a certain specific proportion of food and water is more beneficial than the water alone. To this food and fresh water are added varying amounts of sea water.

It is hoped to learn whether a possible combination of concentrated nourishment, which shipwrecked men could carry, can be taken in combination with limited fresh water and small amounts of sea water without deleterious effects.

During the tests, which extend from six to eight days at a time, after which a "rest period" is given them, the boys are submitted to continual blood, urine, heart, metabolism and other tests. In a six-day run, they lose as much as sixteen pounds.

The two pioneer subjects come from entirely different environments. One is a Baptist from Pittsburgh. He was drafted in his senior year in college and claimed exemption on conscientious grounds. His family are not objectors. He had done reconstruction work with the Quakers after an earthquake in Mexico. He had planned to study law, but his experience in the hospital has made him want to be a doctor.

The other boy is a New Yorker with no religious affiliations; an avowed pacifist who lost his job as an assistant buyer when he proclaimed his views after Pearl Harbor. He wants to do rehabilitation work in Europe if he can.

In Champaign, Illinois, four young men are vigorously bestirring themselves under tropical conditions of heat and humidity. In Chicago, another group faces a mock Arctic. These experiments are to study nutritional needs of men who must live, fight or work in the frozen North or the teeming jungle.

"Very little has been done on environmental effects on nutritive requirements, and this work is expected to be extremely valuable in the war and the postwar period," say Professor H. H. Mitchell, in charge of the Champaign experiments. Highly important and therefore guarded with extreme secrecy are the experiments in another city on nutrition under high pressure.

Temperature test.

Less romantic was the experience of twenty-five boys in a New Hampshire CO camp. They were used as insect incubators in an effort to discover a protection against typhus-bearing lice.

Hundreds of conscientious objectors are employed as orderlies in hospitals, including sixteen mental hospitals. For the adventurous, there are opportunities. Sixty "CO's" will soon be tumbling head first out of airplanes in their first parachute jumps. If they can take it, they'll be dressed in asbestos suits, strapped into steel corsets and taught to land in treetops, shinny to the ground and fight forest fires.

There are, of course, emergency jobs in which CO's have a chance to demonstrate that they are "willing to die." Denton Darrow, a twenty-two-year-old Oregon boy, took one of these jobs and lost his life. He was one of twenty-one volunteers chosen by the Coast Guard to comb the Oregon coast for survivors of a plane that had crashed. He was drowned while trying to cross a five-foot crevasse on which the waves were breaking.

Less spectacular are the hookworm-control project in Florida, and the reconstruction and rehabilitation projects —notably one in Puerto Rico. The majority of the boys have been engaged in the activities which have been handed down by the now defunct CCC—soil conservation, fire fighting under the United States Forestry Service, work in national and state parks and in the Bureau of Reclamation.

Very soon, a more important function will be turned over to a number of CO's who will be called upon to help fill the need for farm labor. This is a practical step, since the majority of CO's are farm-bred.

Forest fire fighting.

Of course, it must be remembered that many conscientious objectors are serving in the noncombatant branches of the Army—Quartermaster Corps, Engineers, Medical Corps—"units which are unarmed at all times." Records are not complete but a safe estimate might be 10,000. There are some, the "absolutists," who refuse any kind of service. There are perhaps 1,400 of these in jail.

On the whole, the conscientious-objector problem has proved simpler in this war than in the last. Two things may furnish the explanation. In the first place, according to the law, nobody is exempted from some form of service. The word "conscience" may be the other explanation. The principle of freedom of religious conscience has been written into the law.

On the practical side, as Ernest Angell, chairman of the committee on conscientious objectors, puts it, we have recognized "the futility of coercing men to do what a higher sanction than law forbids."

"We have," he says, "accommodated law to the vast majority of consciences."

America has grown conscience conscious.